1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

good as the village reciter, this being justified on the grounds that the 'village girl is always one-eyed'. Introduction of cash crops like sugar-cane and cotton has caught on for the same reasons as landlords who can afford to live in the city grow such crops. Emulation of city standards for social prestige is obvious in the example of those few people who white-washed their houses mainly on the outside but seldom inside, in contrast to the dark grey colour of mud, the ordinary house coating. The same whitewash with inscriptions from the Koran concerning pilgrimage, crude paintings of camels, and mahmal procession also form the outside decoration of the houses of pilgrims made immediately after their return from Mecca.

While some articles of men's wear or some parts of their speech have been affected by city ways, women's dress and language have hardly been affected at all. This is partly due to their relative restriction of movement and travel compared with men. On some occasion, there was a commotion in the village concerning the spread of city headgear among the women. This led to their nightly itinerary to fill their jars from the Nile being stopped for a while, as the men complained that women made it an occasion for displaying their colourful headgear.

The villagers appreciate the fact that city dwellers are much more inclined to mind their own business and engage in no gossip. Their attitude towards gossip is, however, paradoxical. It is considered sinful to talk about somebody behind his back; the Koran condemns it, and the Prophetic Tradition warns against it as 'gossip eats up the good deeds as the fire eats up wood'. Much of the village preacher's advice in the Friday sermon is on the avoidance of gossip and the use of the human tongue which could be like the scorpion's tail. Yet on the other hand, the villagers in their formal and informal gatherings occupy themselves with talking about the doings, the problems, the quarrels, and the general business of other people. They will tell you that they are engaged in just having a mouthful of words, or just chewing the cud. It is well known that gossip is almost an institution in rural areas, partly informative, partly interpretive, and on the whole functions as a means of social control and a medium for the formation of public opinion. In this connection, my informant Ali told me that townspeople have more scope for piety, as the occasions for gossip do not arise as among the people of Silwa.

One of the main things that a small number of enlightened villagers are aware of is the fact that in the cities people can find more religious enlightenment as to what are the principles of pure religion in distinction from religion mixed with pre-Islamic customs (Jahilyia), which they think are prevalent in the village. On enquiring about examples of the supremacy of the chances of the city dwellers over the villagers in this respect, most of the information elicited concerned religious ritual. Ali, as well as other persons, stated that city people know how to perform their ablutions better, how to say their prayers in more acceptable way, and have no more [illegible]

we shall probably be rather under- than overstating the case if we reckon the agricultural population, which is the subject of our enquiries, at twelve million souls.

Moreover, this population is increasing. Less rapidly, it is true, than that of Cairo, where between 1917 and 1927 the increase was 28%, while in the country it scarcely exceeded 10%. But in the city the rise is largely due to an influx from abroad and from the countryside; in the country it is dependent on the birthrate alone.

Thus the rural density of population is about 1300 persons to the square mile (11). Such a situation is probably without parallel except in Tonkin, where six million peasants live on 5150 square miles, giving a density of 1165, or 93% of the population on 16% of the territory. Of this mass three millions live at a density of 1400, and more than one and a half millions at 2800 (12).

The density of population in the Nile Valley is explained by the concurrence of all the conditions, geographic, economic and social, which favour a high birthrate. The climate is warm, the valley itself is flat, uniform, tractable and strictly defined. There are plentiful food crops which can provide locally for a numerous population; maize, corn, rice, lentils and beans grow throughout the country.

The cultivation of cotton necessitates a settled concentration of workers, whose labour may bring considerable profit. The perennial irrigation system on the one hand requires many labourers, and on the other hand, by raising the productivity of the soil, makes it possible for more people to live on it. The soil is divided into many small properties, either rented or privately owned. These small holdings only accentuate the overcrowding which causes them. Help is wanted as cheap as possible; children can provide it. Thus the fellah is forced by the exigencies of the land to have children, and as many as possible. This for him is the meaning of marriage and the family. Where all these conditions exist together, as in the province of Menoufiya in the Upper Delta, where the land has been longest cultivated and irrigated, where cotton is the chief crop and small holdings are the most numerous, a density of over 2,000 to the square mile is to be found (13).

Where favourable conditions are fewer the density grows less. This is so in the South, in the districts above

assign to each month its proper task. Wheat, which at that time was the main crop, is frequently mentioned, but the new-fangled cotton not at all [24].

This same calendar also regulates the Coptic ecclesiastical year, for when Christianity came to Egypt it made no change in the existing customs. The reckoning begins from A.D. 284, the first year of Diocletian's reign, called 'The Year of the Martyrs'. In actual fact, the great persecutions took place in A.D. 304.

Moslems, on the other hand, start from the *hegira*, or Flight of the Prophet (622 A.D.), and count in lunar months.

Since 1875, Egypt has officially employed the Gregorian Calendar, which is gradually penetrating everywhere. The Government has not kept the ancient Egyptian names for the months, nor has it translated the Roman names. It has simply taken over their popular adaptations as follows: - *yanayer*, *febrayer*, *mâris*, *abrîl*, *myo*, *yûnyo*, *yûlyo*, *oghostos* and so on. The Ministry of Agriculture works by this calendar to the exclusion of the other two, and so, if not actually used by all the fellaheen, it is understood by most of them.

At this point it will be convenient to describe the principal crops of contemporary Egypt, which are also those at which most of the fellaheen work, namely cotton, which is the main source of the country's wealth; maize and wheat, which provide its daily bread; and *berseem*, the fodder of its cattle. Of the rest we shall say only a word or two in passing.

A. THE "GARDENING" OF THE COTTON PLANT

Cotton was not unknown to the Ancient Egyptians. Some fabrics of Pharaonic times seem to be woven of cotton thread, and Pliny mentions its use. Its development in Egypt for industrial purposes took place in the mid-nineteenth century after the experiments of Jumel. Perennial irrigation, introduced about the same time, together with the increase of the population, and the advantageous openings on the English market, very soon made cotton the principal crop of the country. The world crisis of 1930, which led to a slump in cotton, forced the Egyptian Government to restrict it to a quarter of the total cultivated area. Despite

248 this control cotton remains the staple crop of Modern Egypt,
656 It is planted in every *mudiriya* from Beheira to Aswan.

First of all, to avoid intermixture of varieties, which would lower the quality and ruin the reputation of its long-staple cottons, the Ministry of Agriculture takes over the control of all seed from the time of ginning. The fellah buys his seed well in advance from agents of the Royal Agricultural Society, the *Crédit Agricole* or ginning firms. When the
248 field has been prepared by two or three cross-ploughings and divided into furrows, he brings the seed for planting. Then he pushes a few seeds at a time, from six to ten according to the variety, into small holes set about eight inches apart on the southern edge of the furrow and made with a sort of dibble, which also serves as a measuring stick. A fortnight later he visits his seedlings, and near any holes which show no signs of growth he plants more seeds, which he waters by hand. After six weeks the young plants are grown and are even too close. The fellah proceeds to thin out the clusters, leaving in each hole two plants only, and rooting out all the rest. Meanwhile he irrigates the fields, every 15 to 25 days in May and June, and every 12 to 15 days in July. After seeing that every furrow gets its complement of water he uproots the weeds and strips the top bud from each plant, so as to improve the growth of the cotton by preventing the stem from growing too tall. In this way thousands of square miles are not so much farmed as gardened.

348 Like gardening, cotton cultivation demands abundant
461 labour at command. It therefore presupposes, or produces,
464 a dense population, unless machinery makes up the shortage, as in the United States. It is all the easier to obtain the large number of workers required, as the work itself is easy. Women and children here are as good as men, and increase the family's earnings. This fact has contributed largely to the success of cotton in Egypt.

After a brief flowering, which begins in July, the pod bursts open, then the fruit develops and is ready for picking. Twice between the end of August and early October, the whole of the village, divided into gangs under the harrying orders of overseers (*rayess*), sets to work picking the cotton. There
[533] is a recognised chanter of work-songs, to the rhythm of whose music the white tufts of the cotton plant must be deftly stripped off. None must be missed, yet not a single

leaf may be picked with them. When the pouch formed by raising the lap of the *gallabiya* is filled, the worker goes to empty it in a clearing in the middle of the field, and then resumes his place in the line. From the clearing an endless file of fellaheen carries the cotton to the storeyard (*shoona*) belonging to the owner or the bank. Thence, some time later, it will go on donkey or camel back to the ginning and pressing factory, where from September to April, in an atmosphere of stifling dust, thousands of fellaheen, especially children, load and unload the ginning machines which separate and sort the seeds [25]. After a third picking nothing is left on the fields but brushwood. This is pulled up by hand, or cut down level with the soil, then bound into bundles and stacked on the rooftops to be used as fuel.

B. The Poor Man's Bread

After cotton, maize is the most important crop, covering about a million and a half feddans. Its introduction and general adoption are comparatively recent, though it became popular in Egypt before cotton, and was already well established in the Mameluke period.

In 1810 Sylvestre de Sacy wrote: "*Dura*, a large species of millet, is one of the commonest crops in Upper as well as Lower Egypt, and the people live in great part on bread made from *dura*."

Dura is the Arabic name for maize. The Ministry of Agriculture calls it *dura shamiya* or Syrian maize, to distinguish it from *dura eweiga* or *rafi'a*, the ancient millet.

Throughout Africa, wherever there is sufficient water and a rich soil, the different varieties of millet are giving place to maize, a cereal of American origin which is easy to cultivate, quick-bearing and favourable to a subsidiary crop. This is especially the case in Egypt. In fact the *dura rafi'a* is now planted only on about 300,000 feddans in Upper Egypt, where the basin irrigation system still holds, and is growing rarer with the advance of perennial irrigation. Maize has conquered the Nile Valley, because it has proved so suitable to the fellah and to the soil that it is reputed the world's best. Only that of Mozambique can compare with it.

The fellah sows it broadcast in July, gives it plenty of manure, and waters it seven times. Thirteen to fifteen

461
465 the produce of the vegetable patch, or a present of maize.

The Fellah as Share-Cropper

427 As day labourer the fellah works on large properties, as
465 *métayer* or share-cropper on a small plot of five or at most ten feddans. Under this system the owner enters into partnership with the fellah as follows:

The owner pays the taxes and irrigation dues, provides the farm implements, cattle, seed and manure. The fellah, as head of a family, provides labour for all the year's crops, from ploughing to harvest. For this he receives a fifth or a quarter of the yield of his plot. He may also bear half the expenses, in which case he takes half the crop. The contract is always verbal, and varies in detail.

This system involves no risk as it guarantees the owner a maximum of work, and the fellah his livelihood. It cannot, however, be very profitable to the fellah, because even if he labours continuously with every possible aid from his family he cannot manage to work more than five feddans. At the end of the year he has only the produce of one or one and a quarter feddans, that is to say about L.E. 12, for the efforts of his whole family over twelve months. In a bad year he will have less to show even than this. Finding
[426] himself short of money before harvest, he goes to the owner for an advance to buy a *gallabiya*, or pay the expenses of a circumcision or a funeral. Such loans, with their interest, sometimes come to more than his part of the bargain. In this case he will not only receive nothing when accounts come to be settled, but in addition his work will be already pledged for the following year.

The Fellah as Tenant Farmer

427 To rent land outright is more adventurous. The tenant takes a field at a fairly high rent, from L.E. 6 to L.E. 22 a feddan according to the district; he pays all expenses, but keeps all the produce. The owner is responsible only for taxes. The lease is long, and usually covers the full rotation of crops over two or three years.

For example a fellah of the rich district of Mit-Ghamr rents two feddans at L.E. 20 for the agricultural year. He
[243 plants one with cotton, which produces 4 *cantars* (31), each
248] worth about L.E. $3^1/_2$. The cotton goes to the owner, making L.E. 14 towards the rent. On the other feddan he sows

part *berseem*, and part wheat for the winter. The *berseem* is consumed by his cattle, the wheat produces 2½ *ardebs*, selling at about L.E. 6, but the landowner keeps back L.E. 4 of this as the second instalment of rent.

The tenant then plants his maize for the *nili* crop on his two feddans, but before the harvest he must pay the balance of his rent (L.E. 2) to the owner, and can then take the maize for himself. In fact it is only the yield of this last crop which really belongs to the fellah and his family. After setting aside enough to feed his family, he sells what is left. If all goes well he may be about L.E. 6 to the good.

But all may not go well. If the crop has been poor, or there was a blight, or the crop has been badly sold, the tenant must still pay the full rent, as provided in Article 392 of the Egyptian Civil Code. Ruin is the result. Sometimes (e.g. in the three years from 1929 to 1932) catastrophe has been so general that the Government has had to issue decrees for the reduction of rent in a proportion of 25% to 40% according to the date of contract. The State cannot always intervene, and owing to the keen demand land is rarely let except at high rents. The consequences for the fellah are frequently disastrous.

One unhappy tenant farmer, whose *gamoossa* had just been seized, explained the situation to an inquirer in these words:

"I hired two feddans at L.E. 12 apiece. On each I spent L.E. 5 in seeds, manures and so on, not to mention my labour, that of my children, and the help of my animals throughout the year. What is the result? One feddan yielded four *cantars* of cotton, which sold at L.E. 12. The other produced five *ardebs* of corn and seven of maize, which brought me L.E. 13. Out of this L.E. 25 I had already spent L.E. 10, so how could I pay my rent of L.E. 24? I had to sell the *gamoossa*."

"But if you only lose, why continue to rent land?"

"Because farming is the job I learnt from my fathers, and I don't know how to do anything else."

"But why rent land at such a high price?"

"Because the local landowners have conspired to keep the prices up, and the fellaheen do not know how to get them lowered."

563 852 rite. Three rush baskets filled with different kinds of grain are brought into the room. One supports the sieve in which the infant is lying. When it is time for the bath, the midwife shakes the sieve, as if to sift both the child and the corn. Then she puts the grain back into the basket, wraps up the child and sprinkles a few grains upon it.

853 243 431 465 The word *fitâma*, used for the weaning of children, is also used for the tenth and last watering of the maize. Sweet cakes are given to the workers that day, as to the mother, for it is the last day of suckling.

243 777 789 Harvest is always accompanied by symbolic acts. Before reaping begins, the best ears are taken and plaited into a kind of doll called the 'Bride of the Corn', which is hung up in the house to bring good luck during the ensuing year. Similarly, to bind the chain of life, the biggest grains are mixed with the seed for the next sowing, and a few fine loaves are slipped into the heap on the threshing-floor to be winnowed and sieved.

782 789 Mgr Khouzam, reporting on his pastoral visit in November 1937, wrote as follows: "On entering their houses, I blessed water, bread and corn. They drank some of the water and used the rest to sprinkle themselves, their cattle and their houses. The corn they flung into their fields. As for the bread, I was made to break it and eat a little of it. The rest they kept among their stores that God might bless what they had laid by."

789 465 431 735 246 The joy of harvest shines also on those who have not ploughed, but whose work in the village has benefited the whole community. Tradition allots the first fruits of the harvest to the reciter, the barber, the cantor of the mosque, the schoolmaster and the carpenter. After these have claimed their sheaves, the poor come to glean their share. Cotton-picking, however, gives rise to no sort of ceremony. This is perhaps because cotton has only recently been introduced; or because it is grown for profit and not for daily bread (").

245 The date palm, on the contrary, is as old as Egyptian agriculture itself, and figures at all times in the life of the people. They turn to this tree for shade and for roofing, for beds and coops, for ropes and brushes. We have seen its

3: Ayrout M-5 (ca. 1935) 1945
MR13 Fellahin MR13 ●
Egypt MR 1

F 184 665 cratic forms can never have been so misleading. But that is not the worst evil, as we shall see.

E 652 439 651 The economic progress of Egypt is as striking as its political development. The country's financial prosperity is remarkable. Even before the war the State had a gold reserve of thirty million pounds, and between 1925 and 1935 it almost doubled. The budget never shows a deficit. The constant increase of revenues from the Customs and the railways, the capital of the limited companies, both foreign and Egyptian, the development of local industry (the Bank Misr companies employ 200,000 men), the place of Egyptian cotton on the world's market, the improved quality of the crops, the systematic extension of perennial irrigation and therefore of agricultural production — all these are signs of prosperity.

F 178 But this progress has resulted in no increased well-being for the fellah. His standard of life and his methods of work have remained unchanged, for all this progress was based on his labour. His ignorance and stagnation were the conditions for this capitalist prosperity.

F [248 249] 'The so-called rich crops', wrote an economist some time ago, 'that is to say cotton and sugar-cane, will not fail to influence the evolution of the fellaheen, since the one develops capital, which will effect an improvement in agriculture, and the other industry, which will sharpen the fellah's wits by the use of machinery.'

F 511 In fact, neither capital nor industry has helped the fellaheen. Both before and after the boom of 1920 their financial affairs were as bad and their poverty as great as a hundred or a thousand years ago. There are even signs, and that in official reports ('[1]), of a lowering of the standard of living. It is the fashion to attribute this to the increase in the population, though 'Aly Shamsy Pasha also cites 'the unequal distribution of agricultural wealth' ('[1]). In the midst of this poverty in prosperity there are still landowners whose incomes are L.E. 12,000 to L.E. 15,000 a year.

F 183 Yet here again the evil must not be exaggerated. There may be something worse than poverty — ignorance.

E 873 The intellectual revival of Egypt has been dazzling. Under the reign of Fuad I especially, learned institutions were multiplied. The Fuad I University, which did not exist twenty-five years ago, has today nearly 10,000 students,

3: Ayrout M-5 (ca. 1935) 1945
MR13 Fellahin MR13

311
474
291
133

Digging ditches

248
133

Putting the harvested cotton into sacks